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SUBJECT: GABON: PROBLEMS ARISING OVER PRESIDENTIAL RECOUNT

¶1. (U) Summary: Gabon's Constitutional Court announced its plans to review the government's vote tallies and other challenges to President-elect Ali Bongo Ondimba's victory, but opposition concerns with the court's methodology could delay the process. The opposition wants the court to compare the government's verbal vote tallies with those of opposition observers at the polling stations. The opposition is refusing to participate in the recount until the court changes the procedure and allows more opposition observers in the process. Though frustrated, the ruling party insists that it will not short-circuit the constitutional process. Bongo may hope that this strategy will further enhance his legitimacy with Gabonese and the international community. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On September 29, Gabon's Constitutional Court was supposed to begin the process of reviewing the verbal statements of the vote count issued at 3,000 polling stations to address opposition allegations that the verbal vote tallies did not match the final vote count. However, the opposition rejected the Court's September 25 announcement that only one representative from the opposition and one from the ruling party would be allowed to witness the process and that the recount was only of the verbal tallies presented to the government. The opposition protested this process, demanding that the court needed examine the opposition's records of the vote tallies at the polling stations and compare them with the final results. The opposition informed the court it would not participate until it receives a formal reply. The court had expected to hear presentations from the candidates' lawyers, including Ali Bongo's legal team, on October 1 and 2, but the current impasse will likely delay the hearing of the challenges.

¶3. (SBU) Faustin Boukoubi, the Secretary General of the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG), stated publicly that "the election took place openly. Whether you recount once or 100 times, it doesn't change the results." Boukoubi told the Ambassador that the ruling party would continue to respect the constitutional process and take all necessary steps to satisfy the legal requirements.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: We expect this saga to play itself out in the Constitutional Court over the next two to three weeks. The opposition will continue to use all legal means to slow down what it views as Ali Bongo's eventual installation as President. For its part, Bongo, confident in the ultimate outcome, appears willing to tolerate the legal delays in order to bolster his legitimacy domestically and with the international community. The delays also work to Bongo's advantage, giving him more time to negotiate with disgruntled ruling party members as he makes preparations for his new government.

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